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Press Release: Influenza

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The flu season is quickly approaching and with the arrival of the Influenza A H1N1 (Swine flu) this year we feel it necessary to review the basics so everyone is prepared and knowledgeable about what to expect. The current strain of H1 N1 flu that arrived in the U.S. this April is new and most Americans have little or no previous exposure to it and therefore have no immunity against it. Those who have been primarily affected are children and women. Those who have been less affected are the elderly who may have some immunity based upon previous outbreaks of Swine flu in 1976 and earlier. There are currently trials underway for a vaccine for the Swine flu and it is projected to come out in mid-October. Those who will be targeted to receive the vaccine this fall are: all people aged 6 months to 24 years, pregnant women, people who care for infants less than 6 months of age (as they cannot receive the vaccine themselves), healthcare providers and those with chronic health problems less than 64 years of age. As more vaccine becomes available other population groups will be offered the vaccine as well. It is anticipated that because this is a new strain most persons will need two doses of the vaccine given 4 weeks apart to provide sufficient immunity.

Regarding the seasonal flu that we see every year in the U.S. the vaccine will come out in September and those who should receive that vaccine are the same as in previous years: all persons aged 50 and older, all persons 6 months of age and older with chronic health problems, residents of long-term care facilities, pregnant women, and all persons 6 months to 18 years of age. With the seasonal flu those who are primarily affected are the young and the old. So it is important that the elderly continue to get the Seasonal flu vaccine even though they are not first targeted group to get the Swine flu vaccine this fall.

Additionally, the pneumococcal vaccine is recommended to prevent a serious complication of the flu which is pneumonia. The elderly, the very young, those with chronic health problems and smokers should receive this vaccine. Most people only receive one dose of pneumonia vaccine in their lifetime, unless they received it before the age of 65. In that case a booster may be needed. Please check with your doctor to see if you have had the pneumonia vaccine and if you will require a booster dose. You can receive the pneumonia and flu vaccine at the same time.

General precautions for both the Swine and Seasonal flu are the same: cover your cough, wash hands frequently, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth as this is how the flu is spread, and avoid contact with those who are sick. Another consideration if you do get the flu is the usage of anti-viral medications to decrease the severity. These are medications that your doctor can prescribe within the first 1-2 days after onset of symptoms and can greatly reduce the symptoms associated with the flu. These medications can be used for both the Seasonal and Swine flu.

Please call the Sauk County Public Health Department with questions at 608-355-3290